DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN WHO ARE SEXUAL MINORITIES: NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS AFTER THE CHILDREN COME OUT

Shojima S.

Teikyo Heisei University, Department of Clinical Psychology, Japan

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Many parents of LGBT individuals learn their children are members of a sexual minority when their children come out. The aim of this research is describing the developmental changes in their relationships to elucidate the process of accepting their LGBT children while focusing on the parents’ negative emotions against their children and how the parents perceive the situation.

I conducted semi-structured interviews for 2–10 hours between one and 3 times with three mothers and a married couple whose children have come out as sexual minorities. In the interviews, I mainly asked the parents questions regarding their feelings about their children identifying as sexual minorities. I read the transcripts of the interviews and analyzed them in the framework of a narrative approach. Further, I focused on the parents’ negative emotions toward their children or perceptions of their children.

Not normal,” “alien, strange,” and “cannot help but be prejudiced” were the narratives in the parents’ negative perceptions of their LGBT children. The parents’ negative emotions include a feeling of “powerlessness”, “resignation”, “guilt”. Except for the one couple, all the parents passively accepted the situation that “they have no choice”; however, the parents began to search for an act of “atonement” for their failure to help their children by exploring their options regarding providing support their children from now on.

The result demonstrates that the parents’ relationship with their children is something inseverable even if they wanted to, which is reflected in their ambivalent responses. The parents’ negative emotions and perceptions are not universally pessimistic. By contrast, the coming out served as an opportunity for the parents to reassess their relationships with their children. I argue that a dynamic aspect beyond the framework of the conventional stage model has been revealed in the process of parents accepting their children who have come out as sexual minorities.